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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000136

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2018

TAGS: [PHUM CU](#)

SUBJECT: CUBA HUMAN RIGHTS ROUND-UP: JAN 25-FEB 8

REF: HAVANA 107

Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly: For reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) FIFTY FAMILIES EVICTED FROM SETTLEMENT IN HOLGUIN: On January 29, about fifty families were evicted from the El Piti neighborhood on the outskirts of the city of Holguin. According to independent journalist Jose Ramon Pupo Nieves, the families received written notice a month in advance of the eviction. The justification for the eviction was that the land is government owned and therefore the GOC could legally remove the settlers. GOC officials made a first eviction attempt but desisted once they were met by determined dwellers who were unwilling to leave voluntarily. Cuban authorities backed off but returned days later in full force. On Jan 29, a large contingent of police and government workers forcefully removed the families and bulldozed their homes. Families were not offered alternative housing or any other compensation. Independent journalist Juan Carlos Reyes Ocana was called to the scene and, according to witnesses, argued with the police only to be immobilized with pepper spray and beaten. Residents tried to protect him using their bodies as shields. Several people were briefly detained. (Comment: The evictions were a blow to Holguin bishop Emilio Aranguren, who had been approached by some of the potential evacuees and who intervened on their behalf with party officials in Havana and Holguin. Aranguren was successful in staving off the evictions, but only for a short while. End Comment).

12. (C) STATE SECURITY CONFIRMS ANTUNEZ'S PENDING CHARGES: On February 4, Jorge Luis Garcia Perez (Antunez), Martha Beatriz Roque, Vladimiro Roca, Francisco Chaviano and Felix Bonne went to the state security office in Villa Clara to seek clarification on Antunez's legal status after he and his followers attempted a peaceful march on Jan 28. The officer in charge clarified that Antunez was under investigation for "disobedience and resistance." Independent journalist Yoel Espinosa Medrano of Cubanacan Press reported that police summoned people in Santa Clara using rumors that there were "counterrevolutionaries" in town with plans to take over the city's radio station. Police vehicles blocked access to the town's central park and removed several people from the location. To respond to the "threat," state security officers, dressed in civilian clothes, rallied the crowd -- composed of members of the communist party, youth communist league (UJC) and other mass political organizations in front

of the radio station. The situation never deteriorated and the crowd was not used against the dissidents. Independent journalist Guillermo Farinas saw this maneuver by state security as an act of provocation, aimed at discrediting the opposition leaders.

13. (C) SCHOOL VIOLENCE KILLS 12 YEAR OLD STUDENT: On February 1, a 12-year old student was struck by a chair which was thrown by his 17-year old teacher. The incident took place at the elementary school Domingo Sarmientos in the Lawton neighborhood of Havana. The teacher took the child to the hospital, but the student died a few hours later. This account was reported widely by the independent press, however, it has not been reported in the official press. The 17-year old teacher is reportedly an "emergente" (novice teacher). Novice teachers are recruited by the GOC to fill the teacher gap on Cuba. They do not hold a degree and only receive "accelerated" training consisting of ten months or less.

14. (C) WIFE OF DETAINED DISSIDENT ALSO DETAINED: Nerys Castillo Moreno, wife of human rights activist Juan Bermudez Toranzo, who has been held without formal charges since November 2007, was summoned to her local police station in Havana and detained for 24 hours. During her detention, she was told that her husband will be brought to trial on the charge of "dangerousness."

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